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SUBJECT: EAST JAVA'S CHINESE MUSLIMS: IN THE MOSQUE, ON THE STUMP AND
IN THREE LANGUAGES

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11. (SBU) Summary: Surabaya Principal Officer and Pol/Econ officer attended the fifth anniversary ceremony of the construction of the Cheng Hoo Mosque in downtown Surabaya on 28 October. The event went well beyond simple ceremony and demonstrated the importance of the audience to business, politics and religion in East Java. National and local political figures, the PRC Consul General and key members of the Sino-Indonesian business community attended the event held at the symbolic center of Sino-Indonesian Muslim community. The four-hour event showed the importance of the Chinese community in Surabaya as political supporters, financiers and champions of pluralism among Islamic organizations. End Summary

Chinese Muslims Celebrate Community

12. (U) Over 2000 members of the Chinese community attended the October 28 event, which included musical performances, recitation of the Quran in Chinese, Indonesian and Arabic, and a succession of impassioned speeches about the history of the Sino-Indonesian community and its prospects for the future. The event was widely covered in the Chinese and Indonesian language press and showed the variety of ties the Sino-Chinese Muslim community has forged with the East Java's political and religious mainstream. One former East Java governor and at least two prospective gubernatorial candidates gave speeches at the event. The previous Governor of East Java, Basofi Sudirman; the current head of Nadlatul Ulama (NU) in East Java, Ali Maschan Moesa; and the Secretary of East Java province Soekarwo, added a political campaign atmosphere to the evening.

13. (SBU) The head of the national Jawa Pos news syndicate Hasyim Muzadi, who had recently returned from China with a transplanted liver, also attended. Although he did not speak, his presence itself symbolized the growing significance of China as a destination for medical treatment by wealthy Indonesians. Muzadi wrote a series of articles for his paper while undergoing treatment in China and Jawa Pos readers are well aware of his experiences. East Java Elder statesman, former Governor Muhammad Noer, provided his imprimatur on the event by pledging to buy and distribute a guide for new Muslims published in

Chinese, Arabic, English and Indonesian by the Cheng Hoo Foundation. Still a potent political force, Noer's brief public statement served as an iron-clad endorsement of the Mosque's religious and political bona fides.

A Study in Triangulation--Sino-Indonesian Muslims, Politics and China

¶4. (SBU) Every trip to the podium suggested that the road to East Java's Governor's mansion might increasingly run through Chinese Surabaya, and the Cheng Hoo Mosque. A heavily recruited candidate by several political parties, East Java NU Chairman Ali Maschan Moesa's performance was nothing less than a stump speech. Moesa appeared eager to prove his credentials as a religious moderate and top contender for head of the National NU. Moesa stressed his opposition to an Islamic state by saying that the Republic of Indonesia is "the final form" of the country and that Muslims should not seek an Islamic state. Moesa continued, "I asked representatives of Hizbut Tahrir to show me the verse in the Holy Quran that said that there should be an Islamic State. They could not do it." Moesa repeatedly described the diversity of Islamic practice as integral to Islam in Indonesia to much applause.

¶5. (SBU) On 29 October, local media reported that two factions within East Java NU would decide Moesa's fate at a November 4 NU conference. One faction, centered in far eastern East Java, wants to maintain NU's nominal political neutrality and is opposed to Moesa. The second group, from western East Java supports Moesa and the idea of a more politically active chairmanship. Moesa has told members of the Consulate privately that he would prefer to serve as the national Chairman of NU than as the Governor of East Java, but he has not ruled out a run for the governor's mansion.

¶6. (SBU) By contrast Soekarwo, a candidate for East Java Governor from the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), exhorted the

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audience at the Cheng Hoo Mosque to invest in the development of East Java. (Note: As sitting Secretary of the Province of East Java, Soekarwo is currently third in line after the Governor and Vice Governor). By appealing directly to the perceived wealth of the Sino-Indonesian community, and using the now derogatory term "Cina" (instead of the preferred "Tionghua" for China), it appears Soekarwo's understanding of the sensitivities of the Sino-Indonesian community might need early retooling. Sensitivity remains high toward mainstream Indonesian stereotypes of Sino-Indonesians as rich tycoons. Once persecuted by Soeharto regime as a supposed fifth column for the Communist Party of China, Sino-Indonesians have now become a valued bridge to the vast economic markets the PRC.

The Symbolism of Cheng Hoo

¶7. (SBU) The 15th century Chinese navigator Cheng Hoo (also spelled Zheng He) was sent by the Ming imperial court on a series of trading missions. His travels continue to be strong emblems, not just of the arrival of Islam to Indonesia, but also of the beginning of Chinese trade with Java. Cheng Hoo is a source of pride and a symbol of the Mosque's role as a bridge between the two cultures, the head of the Cheng Hoo Mosque foundation took pains to add nuance to the view of Sino-Indonesians toward China: "China is our motherland, but Indonesia is our homeland." The Chinese Consul General, Fu Shuigen, speaking in Chinese without interpretation, avoided discussion of Islam altogether and focused on the achievements of Cheng Hoo and his value as a symbol of peaceful Chinese and Indonesian trade ties. In discussions with Cheng Hoo foundation officers, we learned that students from China were studying Islam at schools associated with the Cheng Hoo Mosque and that more than one delegation of Islamic leaders from East Java had traveled to China in order to visit Muslim communities.

18. (SBU) Despite the apparent sense of camaraderie at this event, tensions between the ethnic Chinese and ethnic Javanese Muslim communities persists. Relations between both Sino-Indonesians and other ethnicities and between Sino-Indonesian Muslims and the non-Muslim majority in their own ethnic community are easily strained. Abdul Chalim Muhammad Zein, head advisor to several Islamic boarding schools and member of the Cheng Hoo Foundation, told us that the design of the Cheng Hoo Mosque was a source of friction between Surabaya's conservative Muslim majority and their Sino-Indonesian Muslim counterparts. Many felt its pagoda structure un-Islamic. Friction also occurred early on within the surrounding Sino-Indonesian neighborhood. Many non-Muslim neighbors complained that the call to prayer broadcast from the loudspeakers in the Mosque was too loud and the volume was subsequently lowered. Struggling to maintain credibility and authenticity in both communities is a persistent challenge to the Cheng Hoo community.

U.S. ConGen Remarks Well Received

19. (U) In remarks given in Indonesian, Surabaya's Principal Officer stressed the close relationship enjoyed by the Consulate and the Muslim community in Surabaya. She highlighted a series of events hosted by the Consulate during Ramadan and spontaneous applause greeted several lines of the speech. Reaction was particularly strong during the Principal Officer's mention of the importance of religious pluralism to both the United States and Indonesia. Local Chinese language press reports highlighted the close relations with the Consulate and noted that Consulate Surabaya's annual Iftars for the local Muslim community during Ramadan, "strengthened understanding and recognition between Muslims of Chinese and other ethnicities and advanced mutual unity and friendship."

MCCLELLAND